

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD)

What is Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD)?

CJD is a rare, degenerative, fatal brain disorder. It is caused by a unique infectious agent known as a prion (pree'-on).

Do we have CJD in Utah?

CJD is found everywhere in the world, but it is very rare. Only one in a million people each year will get this disease. Since 1980, 35 Utahns have died of CJD. This number is not higher than normal.

How do you get CJD?

It is not known how most (about 85%) people with CJD are infected. Men and women are equally likely to be affected. Usually, this disease appears in people who are in their 50's and 60's, but patients in their teens or the elderly can also be affected.

In some cases, the disease has been spread through transplantation of brain covering (dura), corneas, or liver. Rarely, the disease is spread through contaminated surgical instruments. Working in a hospital or mortuary does not increase your chance of getting this disease.

It is believed that a rare variant type of CJD may be caused by consuming meat from cows with Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) or Mad Cow Disease. The highest risk of developing this variant CJD comes from eating brains, eyes, bone marrow, spinal cords, or parts of the intestine. In the United Kingdom, which has the highest risk of BSE, it is estimated that the risk of getting CJD is 1 in 10 billion servings of beef.

People with CJD are not contagious. You cannot get CJD from another person with CJD.

What are the symptoms of CJD?

CJD has a very long incubation period – up to 30 years. Patients with CJD have loss of memory, coordination, and ability to reason, and may have behavioral changes. The symptoms are severe and rapidly progress to death in an average of 7-9 months.

What is Mad Cow Disease?

Mad Cow Disease is Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (or BSE). BSE, just like CJD, is caused by a unique infectious agent known as a prion. BSE is a disease of cows, like CJD is a disease of humans. There is evidence that eating cows with BSE causes a variant CJD. The highest risk is eating brains, spinal cords, or parts of the intestine.

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